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ABSTRACT

In 1989, a study was conducted to determine whether General Educational Development (GED) certificate holders and students with high school diplomas achieved the same degree of academic success at Lorain County Community College (LCCC). The study subjects were LCCC students who were admitted just prior to the 1988-89 school year, including 40 students with high school diplomas and 40 GED certificate holders. The GED group was comprised of: 18 (45%) males; 31 (77%) Caucasians; and 19 (42.5%) married students. The diploma group was comprised of 11 (27.5%) males; 37 (92.5%) Caucasians; and 5 (12.5%) married students. Mean grade point average (GPA), credit hours attempted, credit hours completed, and placement test results were averaged for each of the two groups. The study found that the diploma students produced significantly higher GPA's and attempted and completed more credit hours than did the GED students. GED students had an average GPA of 1.95, attempted an average of 12.4 credit hours, and completed 10.8 credit hours, while diploma students had an average GPA of 2.66, attempted an average of 33.3 credit hours, and completed an average of 31.4 credit hours. In addition, the placement mean scores of the diploma students were significantly higher than the GED students, with the average GED student needing remedial work in English, reading, and mathematics, and the average diploma student needing remedial work only in mathematics. (JMC)

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A Comparison of the Academic Success of GED Certificate Students and High School Graduates at Lorain County Community College

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Abstract

The mean scores of grade point average (GPA), credit hours attempted, credit hours completed, and college placement results (assessment of English, reading, and mathematic skills), were tabulated for two groups; General Education Development (GED) certificate holders (N = 40) and high school graduates (N = 40). Through analysis of variance significant differences were found between all the mean scores of the two groups. High school graduates produced higher GPA's, attempted and completed more credit hours, and scored higher on the college placement test.

The General Education Development Test (GED) was first administered in the 1940's by the United States Armed Forces Institute. In the 1950's it was made available to the public. The GED has since increased in popularity as a means of obtaining a high school degree. In 1967 nearly one-quarter of a million people in the United States and Canada were GED candidates. By 1987 the numbers increased to 750,000 (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989). For many GED candidates the test is not the end of their education, but the beginning of their post secondary education. In 1984, GED examinees numbered 706,181, nearly half of whom planned to pursue higher education as compared to one-third in 1984 ("ACE Survey," 1985).

As the number of GED certificate holders grows, there is concern in the college community as to whether or not the GED is a reliable measurement of the academic performance needed at the post secondary level. Research studies conducted at community colleges (Ayers, 1978 and 1980; Byrd, et. al., 1973), vocational institutions (Wilson, Davis & Davis, 1981), two year colleges (Wolf, 1982) conclude that high school equivalency students can succeed in post secondary education as well as students with high school diplomas.

One study conducted at a Canadian university compared the grade point averages and credit hours completed of high school

diploma students and GED certificate holders. The study concluded that there was no statistical difference between the grade point averages or ratio of credit hours passed to credit hours attempted of the two groups of students (Colert, 1983).

The purpose of the present study was to determine if GED certificate holders and high school diploma students achieve the same degree of academic success. This was measured through a comparison of grade point average, credit hours attempted, credit hours completed, and scores on the college placement exam. It was hypothesized that there would be no statistical difference between the two groups of students on any of the comparisons.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were students at Lorain County Community College, Elyria, Ohio. All were admitted just prior to the 1988-89 school year. All students are required to participate in the college placement test to determine if developmental courses are needed in English, reading, and/or mathematics. Table 1 shows the scores needed for developmental and college

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Insert Table 1 about here

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course work. If the score falls in the decision zone, a

counselor and student together select the appropriate course based on previous studies of the subject and student's comfort with the required course work.

Forty of the subjects had high school diplomas and forty were GED certificate holders. All the GED students were identified through student records. The high school diploma subjects were randomly selected by student number. Biographical information was obtained through student admission files.

The GED group was comprised of 18 (45%) males; 31 (77%) Caucasians; 4 (10%) Black Americans; 4 (10%) Hispanics; 19 (42.5%) married. Ages ranged from 20 to 55 years (52.5%, 20-30 years; 27.5%, 31-40 years; 20.0%, 41-55 years).

The high school diploma group was comprised of 11 (27.5%) males; 37 (92.5% Caucasians; 1 (2.5%) Black American; 2 (5.0%) Hispanics; and 5 (12.5%) were married. Ages ranged from 20 to 42 years (52.5%, 20 years; 35.0%, 21-30 years; 12.5%, 31-42 years).

Proceedures

Academic information on each subject; grade point average, credit hours attempted, credit hours completed, and placement scores for English, reading and mathematics, for the 1988-89 school year was gathered through the use of computerized student files.

Mean scores for grade point average, credit hours

attempted, credit hours completed and placement results were tabulated for each of the two groups. Analysis of variance was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the means at at the .05 level of significance.

Results

The mean scores tabulated are summarized in Table 2. In

Insert Table 2 about here

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all cases the mean scores were significantly different at the .05 level. The diploma students produced significantly higher grade point averages, attempted and completed more credit hours than the GED students.

The placement mean scores of the diploma students were significantly higher than the GED students. The English, reading, and mathematic mean scores of the GED students indicated that development course work was needed. The mean scores of the diploma students indicated that no English or reading developmental course work was needed. The mathematic assessment score indicated a need for developmental Algebra.

Discussion

The results of this study do not support the hypothesis that GED students achieve the same degree of academic success as high school diploma students, nor do the findings support the

conclusions of previous studies. Significant differences were found in the mean scores of grade point average, credit hours attempted, credit hours completed, and the English, reading, and mathematic placement scores of the two groups.

Limits of this study included the small sample size and the use of only one institution whose, results may be difficult to generalize. Other factors in this study which were not controlled may have contributed to the significant differences, for example: socioeconomic status, employment, and the number of years between withdrawal from high school and completion of the GED.

Further research is needed at all institutions of higher learning to determine if the GED is a reliable measure of knowledge. If other studies were to conclude that GED students lack needed skills, changes in the GED test and changes in the services offered to these students at the post secondary level would be necessary to ensure the academic success of these students.

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Table 1

Course Recommendations Based On Placement Scores

English Usage

0 - 47 = Developmental Writing

48 - 49 = Decision Zone

50 - 64 = College Composition

Reading Skills

0 - 24 = Developmental Reading

25 - 27 = Decision Zone

28 - 40 = No Developmental Needed

Mathematic Skills

0 - 17 = Fundamentals of Math

18 - 20 = Decision Zone

21 - 32 = Developmental Algebra

Table 2

Mean Scores of GED and Diploma Students and F Ratio Calculations

Student	GPA*	Hours Attempted**	Hours Completed**	Placement Scores Eng.	Read.	Math
GED	1.95	12.4	10.8	39.7	23.2	17.5
Diploma	2.66	33.3	31.4	48.3	27.7	21.5
F Ratio	7.70	42.11	37.45	13.7	7.3	6.4

Level of Significance = .05 (3.97)

* Grade Point Average (GPA) Scale; 4.00 = A, 3.00 = B, 2.00 = C, 1.00 = D

** Based on three quarters; 12 hours/quarter = full time status

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